

Congresswoman Betty McCollum

Remarks to the Association for International Agricultural and Rural Development

March 3, 2009

Good afternoon everyone. I'm so glad to be here with you today to talk about global food security and agriculture.

You might be wondering why a Member of Congress from America's Heartland cares so much about agriculture in villages half-way around the world. It's because I've been to the villages. And it's because I'm from a big city in a farm state. In Minnesota, everybody is just one – or maybe two – generations from the farm.

At home I'm not a Democrat, I describe myself as a member of the Democratic-Farmer-Labor party.

Minnesota's Fourth District is home to the University of Minnesota's school of agriculture where the Green Revolution was born. And I am also proud to represent one of the world's best farmer cooperatives, Land O'Lakes.

Land O'Lakes does business in America's fifty states and works in more than fifty countries from Malawi to Sri Lanka through its International Development division. In fact, I have had the opportunity to visit many of these projects.

Land O'Lakes and many other organizations represented at this forum are committed to fighting global poverty and hunger through agricultural development. And you're doing it the hard way, the only way – person to person, one village at a time. But for too many years you've fighting this battle with too little help.

After the great victories of the Green Revolution, agriculture fell out of fashion in Washington, and in other donor-country capitals. Year by year, investments in farmers have declined. For example, U.S. aid to African farmers fell from \$500 million in 1988 to less than \$100 million in 2006.

The consequence has been more poverty, more hunger and less economic growth for the developing world. Last year's global food crisis showed how deeply vulnerable much of the world has become.

Global agriculture is important to me and it needs to once again be a priority for American foreign policy. But it won't be enough just to add food security to America's long list of global priorities. It must be placed at the center of our global development agenda in countries where hunger persists or agriculture is a major part of the economy. And those of you working in the field know that describes most developing countries.

Today, the U.S. and other donors are running from one famine to the next, trying to solve chronic hunger with emergency aid. But we're not really helping people take control of their

futures and change their lives if we're not helping them prevent the next crisis.

America needs a smarter strategy to fight global hunger, one that cultivates more than dependence. A smarter strategy is a comprehensive strategy that combines emergency food aid with longer-term investments in agricultural productivity. A smarter strategy also includes major investments in nutrition, research, and infrastructure.

Without a "food first" approach to development, none of America's other international investments will take root. For example, global health and basic education are essential efforts. But when PEPFAR patients lack nutrition, the drugs don't work; and when children are hungry, they can't learn.

That's why I worked with my colleagues on the House Appropriations Committee to increase investments in global agriculture last year to \$450 million. That's not enough, but it's a solid foundation for us to build on.

And that's why I will be introducing new legislation this spring to increase America's commitment to global food security with a new, comprehensive strategy and the resources it will take to make real change.

The legislation is a team effort with Senators Lugar and Casey. And Senator Lugar is the team leader. I want to recognize Connie from Senator Lugar's staff for all the hard work she's put into this exciting initiative.

And I want to thank all of you for the work you do in the halls of Congress and in rural villages around the world.

Together, we can set new priorities for America's work abroad. It's time to return to the farm fields, get mud on our boots, and give every family the tools they need to put food on their table.

Thank you.